

# development concept plan

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# KENAI FJORDS

## EXIT GLACIER AREA

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## INTRODUCTION

snow and ice of the Harding Icefield is broken only by the protruding tops of mountains. Exit Glacier originates from the northern edge of the

icefield and flows down in a straight line into a beautiful basin of the Resurrection River valley, where mature conifer forests grow and where wildlife is abundant.

This Development Concept Plan serves to guide the development of facilities in the Exit Glacier area of Kenai Fjords National Park for a

## BACKGROUND

Passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in December 1980, which established Kenai Fjords National Park, authorized the secretary of the interior to develop access to the Harding Icefield

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### NATURAL RESOURCES

#### Geology

The Exit Glacier area lies in the central portion of the Kenai Peninsula in southcentral Alaska. The eastern side of the peninsula is composed of the Kenai Mountains, an element of the Pacific Mountain System. The Kenai Mountains reach nearly 7,000 feet in elevation in some locations, but most of the highest peaks in the park are between 5,000 and 6,000 feet.

The Harding Icefield occupies the central section of the Kenai Mountains. The main body of the icefield is about 35 miles long by 15 miles wide, but

smaller portions extend in all directions. The icefield is relatively flat but gently slopes downward from its center. The center attains an elevation of more than 5,200 feet, while the edges are generally between 3,000 and 4,000 feet.

Glaciers radiate out on all sides of the Harding Icefield and pour down through valleys and over bedrock. The main body of the icefield appears to be free of crevasses, but crevasses often develop at the top of the glaciers and generally continue throughout their length. To the south and east of the icefield the glaciers terminate in the Kenai Fiords, many

Mountain goats inhabit the slopes around Exit Glacier year-round. No comprehensive studies have been conducted; however, some aerial

## THE PLAN

This Development Concept Plan presents a package of developments for the Exit Glacier area of Kenai Fjords National Park. These developments will serve to further the opportunity for park visitors to see and experience Exit Glacier, the Harding Icefield, and the flora and fauna of the area. The Exit Glacier area will be the focus of glacier and icefield viewing and interpretation in the park.

### VEHICULAR ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

Resurrection River will be spanned by a permanent, two-lane bridge suitable for buses, passenger cars, and recreational vehicles. The bridge will also accommodate pedestrians, as a great deal of walking and hiking in the Exit Glacier basin is anticipated. The bridge design should not detract from the natural setting of the bridge site.

Approximately 1.4 miles of the existing roadbed on NPS lands will be improved by the application of fine gravels to achieve a high-quality driving surface. These gravels will be obtained outside the park. No lateral expansion of the roadbed will be required. The last one-third mile of the existing roadbed near the glacier will be converted to a trail accessible to the handicapped.

At the end of the improved road a vehicle turnaround and a parking area will be constructed. The parking area will be designed to accommodate 50 private vehicles and several buses; the design will provide for expansion of the parking area should future demand warrant. Both the turnaround and the parking area will be gravel surfaced.

### VISITOR CONTACT STATION

A visitor contact station will be located to the east or south of the parking area at the end of the road. The rustic wood structure will be capable of handling a maximum of 25 visitors. A large, attached porch will provide space for about 25 more people seeking cover from the frequent rains. The overall sheltered area will be able to accommodate a large bus tour group. Information describing the resources and recreational opportunities in the Exit Glacier area will be provided in the visitor contact station where there will be an information desk, publication sales display, and interpretive displays.

The porch will have a "Welcome to the Kenai Fjords National Park" exhibit that will include a locator map showing where Exit Glacier is in the park and in relation to Seward. Orientation to the Exit Glacier area will be aided by a map encompassing the area from Resurrection River to the edge of the Harding Icefield. There will be an invitation to hike the trails in the area. Safety information will be supplied on such topics as icefalls, rock scrambling, river dangers, quicksand, and wildlife

encounters. Informational signs on the porch should be designed to aid



## RESTROOMS AND DRINKING WATER

A minimal public restroom facility will be located near the contact station. Soils and hydrologic conditions will dictate the best methods for disposal

of waste. Drinking water will be available by hand pump near the

## RANGER RESIDENCE

A residence will be constructed near the contact station.

one or more park rangers on a seasonal basis. The small rustic structure

also be included about the hazards of hiking on the bedrock mound and near the glacier.

The trail will ascend the right side of the bedrock mound and then follow the contours of the mound and take advantage of its natural avenues. Only minimal construction will be required to improve the trail.

gravel may have to be brought in to form a reasonably level walking

surface. The trail will lead up the right side of the mound and then traverse a natural ramp to the edge of the glacier. It will not be visible from the various viewpoints in front of the glacier. This trail will permit visitors to walk right up to a portion of the glacier. An excellent view of the basin containing Exit Glacier is available from the top of the bedrock mound.

Another trail will begin at the trailhead near the visitor contact station and proceed through the forest and alder understory toward the stream that issues from Exit Glacier. This trail will remain in the dense

Studies should be conducted on a number of resources in the Exit Glacier area. The information gained through these studies should aid in guiding the development of visitor facilities, ensuring that the natural resources are not adversely affected by development and visitation. This information will also provide material for interpretive purposes. Research should be conducted on the following resources:

Mountain goats and other large mammals in the general area  
Hydrologic regime of the Exit Glacier area  
Glaciology of the Harding Icefield and Exit Glacier  
Flora of the area

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, and parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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